

**Read
The Match!**

AN ANARCHIST JOURNAL
Published since 1969

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*Subscription is free; donations accepted
(cash or stamps only)*

ANARCHISM: A philosophy of
resistance to, and criticism of, all
statist laws and authoritarianism.

A MATCH! BOOKLET

**PULLING
the
STRINGS**

How

Businesses and Institutions

Attempt to Control

the Small Press

By FRED WOODWORTH

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THE non-mainstream press, despite its frequent ineffectiveness, has always been viewed with alarm by the jerks who run society. Probably not a city council in any sizable town, not a university board of regents, "student council", board of supervisors or police chief's office--- or any other entity that wields power — has not at one time or another directed its surprised attention to the unlicensed, unauthorized, unapproved, not-zoned-for small newspaper or journal that was suddenly criticizing that body. The reaction of persons who have never been exposed to radical and independent publications before is interesting; they act as you might imagine someone would who was watching flying saucers land.

Soon, however, their appalled disbelief jells into 'a firm conviction that something must be done'. Direct, forceful censorship or suppression tends not to work, but it's the first thing tried. After that more subtle methods are used, both by people who wish there was NO small press, and by those who only wish THEY were running it. Here we'll look at a few of the effective techniques that have been applied.

Control By Supply

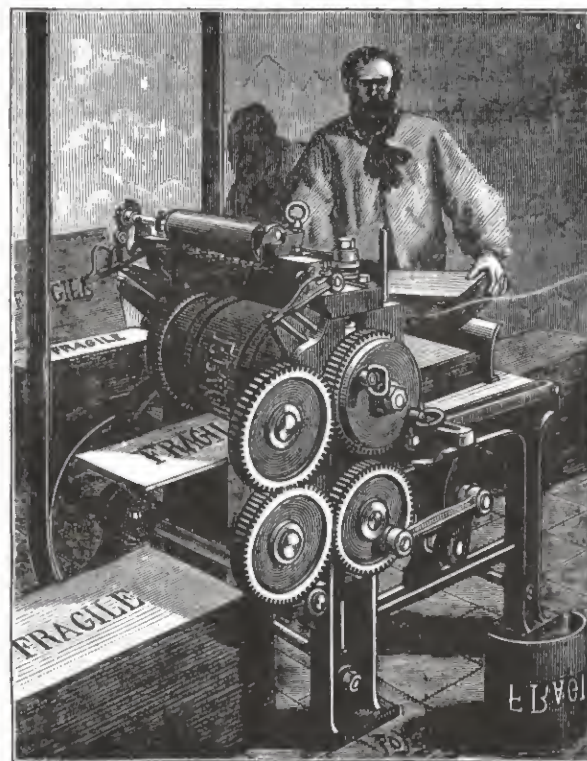
Underground newspapers of the Vietnam era had a typical look, or visual style, which was caused by the operation of several common factors. First, despite the incredible nonsensical version of an underground newspaper office as shown on reruns of Dragnet, there were no clanking letterpress printing machines, no linotypes, no people setting type by hand out of cases. Undergrounds were printed commercially at regular printing companies, from paste-ups laid out on people's kitchen tables.

The typical underground 'office' had too many people in it at any one time, too little work actually being done, and printing deadlines that were often met by frantic last-minute sloppy typing and pasting-up. The biggest problem for the underground publisher was simply filling up pages once the piece-de-resistance or blockbuster expose of the week was laid out.

The underground, in other words, was hungry for prefabricated, graphic-laden and especially typeset articles ready to be plunked down in the gaping holes throughout the newspaper.

It is not 'cantankerous', 'cranky', 'stupid', 'stubborn', 'quaint', 'silly', or 'unrealistic' to insist that the reason for publishing things remains to exert YOUR impact on the world. If you give up some aspects of what is yours, you'll find that one day ALL aspects have vanished and you're totally under the thumb of various authoritarians.

And then there's no point in publishing at all.



result in a one-way trip to the police station so that savage goons in ill-fitting uniforms can rub chili paste in your eyes while cranking away at 90-volt telephone dynamos connected to your genitals, control IS overt, undeniable, and, in a hideously fascinating sort of way, refreshing because you don't have to debate or persuade anybody about it. In arenas of putrid urbanity such as the howling joke on freedom, the United States, by contrast, everything that looks as if it were one way is really another entirely different, and infinitely unwholesome and evil.

In my opinion, the only 'press' in the original sense of the word that remains in America is the largely vanishing alternative press. Modern mainstream newspapers and magazines are as unlike the press of Franklin or Zenger as a TV show is unlike a sunset. The last stages of complete perversion of purpose have been reached in mainstream publishing, and its practitioners now are simply a corporate gang of quackpseudo-professionals justifying their relentless collaboration with police - statism via rationales lifted from fascistic theories of social engineering. The real press in the true sense of that word remains a pure thing in that it goes its own way and is controlled by nobody else.

Obviously, as I've described here, this freedom is precarious. Businesses and institutions maneuver feverishly to wrest control of one aspect after another from those who remain the actual practitioners of the art. If the leeches can fasten their suckers into some area of production, distribution, interaction with readers, or economics, they'll gradually spread and take hold of the rest.

This is an ancient problem for every small publisher, underground or not, and to skip back to frontier days for a moment we find that the lone editor-publisher, having just unloaded his cumbersome old press from a covered wagon and lugged it inside some unpainted wooden building with a false front, ordinarily could not possibly write, set type for, and print a whole newspaper on anything like a regular basis. So, hungry for supply, he and others like him constituted a demand— one that was met by agencies that sold prefabricated newspaper insides on sheets ready for the frontier publisher to finish off with his own material. Tops were left blank in case the editor wished to imprint his own paper's name there, but the main task left (still a considerable one, however) was to write and set up the outside two or four pages.

This expedient enabled a lone hand to put out a substantial article, but whoever wrote and printed those boilerplate inside pages was exerting massive control over what was being said under the paper's banner.

In the case of the undergrounds in the 1960s and '70s, what happened was, first, extensive borrowing. Papers copied at will articles or drawings from others, thus building a spirit of cooperation and solidarity of purpose— though, to a degree, this also tended to homogenize the contents. Because of the widespread use of typewriters for typing the newspapers' directly reproduced columns, publishers usually had their printers reduce the size of the pages photographically when making the plate negatives, so paste-ups were laid out at sizes allowing for

reduction to about 60% of original size. And, as a result, photos or drawings tended to get tinier and tinier as they were picked up by paper after paper, thus limiting the number of successive borrowings unless somebody on the end of the chain made an attempt to seek out the original.

Into this situation stepped a group of Marxists who founded a 'service' called LNS: Liberation News Service. To member papers they would send, about once a week, a packet of prepared clippings on white paper, that could be either laid out and photographed intact, or rewritten. Even if re-written, the underlying marxist politics tended to survive into the final copy; and of course if the copy wasn't revised at all, but merely lifted out of the packet and pasted down for reproduction in the paper, the doctrinaire supplier had full control of what the paper's readership would eventually see.

And more than just writing: Graphic after graphic of oriental peasants with fists upraised in the air; Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese or Algerian insurgents grimly marching forward together, men and women equally, with machine guns and revolutionary Communist banners flying on staffs poking up in profusion. Such artwork set the pictorial tone for LNS and its member newspapers... and anybody who borrowed from them— often dozens of papers.

This authoritarian content is instantly recognizable as such by anyone who had a consistent analysis, but in those hectic days, few did. Most undergrounders were not political theorists or seasoned observers of social movements; they were well-intentioned opposers of the Vietnam

promised by such people are illusory. 'BAM!' is more likely to be the sound effect for your chin hitting the floor than for 'recognition, glory and money' through the intermediation of some external agency. Remember that it's unlikely that many other alternative publishers who may have gone out of business and never published any 'next issue', have ever troubled with such an extensive and frustrating rigmarole as I did, just to collect even smaller sums that were due them for their final issues.

One might ask: Is all this really control? Yes, it's victimization, but control? Can't a publisher just refuse to deal with distributorships of this kind, and be done with it? Sure---in fact I recommend it. But they're still controlling your circulation. Fine Print alone showed 323 bookstores around the country on their last list; that's 323 stores that you couldn't get sold in if you weren't under contract with Fine Print. Those stores weren't about to order from a single unrepresented zine publisher. So yes, it is control.

Conclusion

IN this article I've tried to show some of the ways, sometimes subtle ways, in which people exert control over others' expressions, and shape the public's access to those views. I've neglected obvious methods such as Control By Intimidation because it's my feeling that in this area, overtness is more or less obsolete, at least in those regions of the world where a veneer of sophistication hides the crawling rotteness beneath. In backwater pestholes like Mexico, where your published expressions can

letter, titled 'BAM!' was subtitled: 'Recognition, Glory and Money!' It crowded exultantly:

"...With a strong distribution network, BAM! Recognition, glory and money! And another thing: The mainstream is alternative these days. If you don't think there's a market for your magazine, think again. Alternative and small press are rising again. We're going to make your publication even better than it is. And then, BAM! Recognition, glory and money!"

On an inside page the newsletter advised that Universal Product Codes (bar codes) were now a requirement of Fine Print. If you didn't have one, they'd deduct even more money from what you were supposed to be paid. (Bet that wasn't in the 'contract', either.) It was vital that you have a bar code, though:

"—UPC codes allow us, and many others, to monitor your magazine's circulation accurately and efficiently. And they're indispensable for getting your mag into new markets. If you're thinking about growing, get one. BAM!"

THAT was the last of my dealings with Fine Print— or any other next-timer distributor. A few prior experiences with the breed, years earlier, in which much the same runaround, frustration, contract-bending, and ripoff had flowered, had left me determined that if I ever got involved with one of these mobs again, I'd note down and tape record everything; and that is why the above account is so detailed. However, had I set out with the same idea in mind of documenting the whole interaction, similar accounts might have been written long before.

Take this as a warning about all such groups that fit the same specifications.

The vast rewards in money and readership

war, the draft, and police brutality. If LNS gave them stuff to run that fitted this loose ideology, who cared what it looked like as long as it was a good dark copy that would make a sharp negative for page four?

Control by supply is a very important way of bending recipient journals' contents to somebody's wishes or agenda.

And even twenty years later, one still now and then notices an old LNS graphic, these days reproduced by photocopier in some small zine or tabloid, often now showing dot rastering that indicates it has been scanned into and printed back out of somebody's computer.

TODAY control by supply still works in about the same way. Straight media are supplied, in the case of radio and television stations, with wire services and network programming; and in the case of newspapers the supply arrives as



GARBAGE GRAPHIC: Reproduced here is a line drawing in the old LNS communist/triumphalist style, still making the rounds after conversion through computer scanning and crude insertion of the circle-A symbol. Authoritarian visual appearance effectively subverts anarchist periodicals printing such drawings.

'syndicated' columnists or Associated Press news stories. While there always is locally-originated material, it has to be selected so that it conforms to the style and tone and attitudes of the 'mainstream' material that comes from someplace else and is therefore more sophisticated, knowledgeable, and believable.

A good example of control by supply happening lately is the identical article, reprinted in a number of large-circulation newspapers, on the thuggish vandals in ninja masks, supposedly Anarchists, who are discrediting anarchism in the Eugene Oregon area. If they were creditable positive examples of this philosophy in action, of course there would probably be no article at all in any paper, and if there were it wouldn't be reprinted in all the others.

Naturally, if an expression does get into print or on the air with a viewpoint at odds with official reality, it will in most cases have low readership or be forgotten quickly, simply because it is swamped by the preponderance of 'legitimate' announcements. The only official channel for the expressions of 'citizens' is in the section of local letters to the editor, and this is ordinarily controlled rigidly. Either the paper selects letters that will conform to the paper's brand of authoritarian politics, or it chooses ones that are especially confused and fallacious in order to discredit, by association, all other similar-sounding dissident opinions.

Among the various journals and zines of the alternative press, fully pervasive control mechanisms have so far not gained extensive ground, but they do have a foothold. The Alternative press

term free loans of literature and money; we're supposed to assume on trust that all accounts of sales and destroyed copies are accurate. But when it comes to trust going the other way, not for a second! No way are they going to trust me to honorably return a spare check (in the unlikely event that even one of this rare species should ever turn up at all, let alone a 'spare').

At this point I was in a quandary, trying to decide whether to give permission for them to stop payment on the so-called first check. I realized that the chances were good that if some check from these people really ever did arrive, and if I tried to deposit it, IT would be the one stopped payment on, thus resulting in bank fees for The Match. But, taking a gamble, and resolving to check postmarks closely, I grudgingly gave permission for the stop-payment.

Eventually, on December 27th, a full year and a half after mailing the magazines to Fine Print, and six full months after demanding payment, in writing; and 155 days after being told that payment would be forthcoming in 120 days, a check for \$126 did at last arrive from Fine Print.

Whew!

Was it worth it? For a mailing of 150 copies at a \$2.50 cover price (\$375 worth of magazines) I was belatedly paid the equivalent of 84 cents a copy. I'd paid postage, shipping the copies to the distributor, too, and racked up some phone bills besides. To pry loose even the 84 cents a copy required six full months of effort, two letters, and six phone calls.

Not long after, more promotional literature actually spewed out of Fine Print. Their news-

"The Match... has little patience for cloudy thinking and romanticism within the anarchist left. Every issue is sure to have at least a few cantankerous blasts at others less certain in their opposition to the state, as well as plenty of news and opinion that shows just what a rotten idea government really is."

Notice how cleverly they managed to sneak in patronizing and dismissive language that made it crystal clear that although they had this publication in their 'catalog', they themselves were only snickering at it. Sure, you could order it if you really wanted to...

If The Match were a feminist publication, the equivalent would be some tolerant verbal pats on the head for the plucky little gals, and if we were a Black periodical, we'd be a real credit to our race. Get the picture?

In all seriousness, this dismissive listing reveals one small glimmering of how true censorship works in this country.

MEANWHILE, still no check. Friday, December 16, call number 5: "Well, we mailed it." If so, it never did arrive; at least, not one postmarked during that week.) But maybe it was mixed up in the crush of Christmas mail. They stall me off until Monday.

Monday, December 19. It doesn't arrive, so it's now on to call number 6: Now they want to stop payment on the alleged first check, and issue a 'second check'. Can they just SEND me a 'second' check without stopping payment on the first? OF COURSE NOT! That would mean they'd have to trust ME not to cash both checks! Just exactly what I spoke of earlier: we publishers are supposed to trust these people with long-

version of control by supply may be the mysteriously active freelancer whose works appear in dozens of different zines or alternative journals. The freelancer takes no part in the work of the publication, but only supplies manuscripts. He or she has more time to 'write', while the various small publications' editors who do the work of putting these expressions into print, have less. As the balance quickly tips, the freelancer gains a reputation that allows him or her to broaden the scope of recipient periodicals as still other publishers of tiny papers find themselves the recipients of the honor of being allowed to print the well-known figure's material. In this way the multiplicity of publications shrinks more and more into the sham of a FEW views getting expressed through a multiplicity of outlets. (An especially instructive example of this is the 'Tom Tomorrow' cartoon appearing in dozens of 'alternative' ad-supported weeklies, and countless zines that borrow from them. When the cartoonist—whose name is almost certainly not 'Tom Tomorrow', and who might even be the CIA for all anybody knows—starts demanding congressional action to take guns out of the hands of the populace, he controls the expression issued by dozens of outlets.)

Formal attempts to exercise control by supply take the shape of such efforts as the 'American Information Network', whose mid-1990s releases are subtitled:

'Providing Noteworthy News Items from the Nation's Alternative Press'

A communication from this agency is worth

quoting in the present context. It was signed by one Lawrence D. Dawson:

'I am a journalist who has worked both for a major newspaper chain and had my own publication. You are the publisher of a periodical trying to get some truth out to a people whose minds have been stunted by an ideologically controlled and conspiratorial commercial press. You and several hundred like you are the last hope the nation has for a reality-based journalism....'

(Analysis so far: pure flattery, combined with a false buddying-up. To continue:)

'...Currently, I am a consultant for a publisher who receives 260 publications similar to yours. ...Collectively, you and your colleagues represent a powerhouse of information which you seldom see in the Establishment press. Much of this information would make a valuable contribution to your own periodical. Unfortunately, you must now plow through several hundred publications costing thousands of dollars in subscription fees to get the kernels and this is costly in time and money. We simply don't have an information clearinghouse such as Establishment wire services provide...'

(Analysis: The writer of this letter wants to control this unbridled herd. 'We', i.e., the false community of himself and the letter's reader, need this 'clearinghouse'. That last word is interesting as it NEVER appears anywhere other than spots where somebody is trying to dominate and control something. It indicates a mentality so integrated with the concept of getting things 'cleared' with bosses or superiors, that even when engaged in a bit of subterfuge or conceal-

tending to FAX the CHECK!

Finally she assures me that the 'check is in the mail'. I resist the impulse to retort that I'll only put it in a little way...

Several days go by. No check arrives. What does arrive is an envelope with two solicitations from Fine Print!

One wants The Match to place an advertisement in the upcoming Fine Print Catalogue (oops, for these people that's spelled 'Catalog'--- that must be the really FINE way to print it). The 'Fine Print Advertising Order Form' states that rates for ads will be \$500 for a full page, \$250 for a half-page, and \$125 for a quarter-page. You can pay directly, or...

"You can even take CREDIT ON YOUR ACCOUNT FOR YOUR AD."

Wow. In other words, by trading here at the company store, you won't ever even see ANY of that money in your alleged paycheck; it can be turned back into more 'services' by the distributor!

The second solicitation is "Your chance to get FREE advertising!" Here they want an update on the small listing that they place in the catalogue in order to give YOU the saturation exposure at VAST ARRAYS of 'trade shows' that never generate a single inquiry or subscription.

Here again was a flabbergasting point: Since this distributor had never bothered to send ME the form to fill out in the past, and had never sent along the 'catalog' either, I was amazed to see the previous listing for my journal that was typed on the sheet:

people, give us a call in 120 days, and we'll get you your payment right away then just to help remind us...?"

So much for the automatically computer-generated check.

Monday, December 12, call number 4: "Fine Print."

"Could I speak with Dawn in Payables please?" After a brief hold, she gets on the line and knows all about the situation: "Okay, I have everything ready, I just wanted to... I... I..." (On the tape recording I have she seems to flounder for words.) "Uh, I... I can't tell you WHY we don't have your address or anything or phone number around here, but I wasn't able to locate it, so I... I can't really tell you WHY this is, but... that's what was holding me up. So if you could give me your number, an' your address..." (Why would they need a phone number in order to mail me a check??)

"Well, I don't have a phone number, but I can give you my address." I slowly recite the box number.

"Okay, uh, 85722. Uh, how do you spell your last name?"

Like all of a sudden, they have nothing pertaining to this account at all. No names, no addresses... I was down the memory-hole.

"All right, Mr. Woodworth, I'll get it in the mail this week and... uh... I'll... Do you have a fax number?"

She might as well ask if I have a rocket ship. Hell no, The Match doesn't have a 'fax number', and never will have. And what in Christ's name does she need one for? Certainly they aren't in-

ment of motives, that mind still coughs up the vocabulary connected with this subconscious integration of authority. Going on we find still more of this dominance-oriented language:)

"What is needed? A professional staff which monitors the alternative press, selects out the significant facts and newsworthy items, and delivers them to you in a timely fashion. I have both the expertise and the resources to provide this service and I am inviting you to become a member..."

Notice that he could have simply said 'read' there, not 'monitor'. Monitor, another vocabulary item out of an authoritarian glossary, means to stay alert to some activity all right, but with the overtone of 'in a controlling or dominating manner.'

Further analysis of the last paragraph of the quote should alert any reader to the conclusion that such a 'service' would rapidly convert its member publications into mouthpieces for the person or agency doing the 'selecting'.

Then, as an example of the material that will be supplied, AIN provides a copy of its type of news extracts, and a close reading of this is quite enlightening: Among other articles, the 'service' is trying to plant dozens of items subtly portraying anti-abortion crusaders in a heroic and persecuted light, and touting 'family' and church 'values'. This is not nearly as blatant as it sounds, and it may be possible that a publication or two somewhere with weak political views and a strong but confused commitment to publishing, could be turned into something its publishers never actually wanted, through subscribing to

such a 'service'. Interestingly, listed member publications include REASON Magazine, the John Birch Society Bulletin, the Catholic Worker, and the newsletter of the Institute for Historical Review (the Holocaust-never-happened outfit), along with about 40 others.

The even more subtle danger in this, however, and the one most likely to actually have a real result, is in this fact: One can select out of almost any material whatsoever—if the source is extensive enough—something to support nearly any point of view. When taken seriously out of context, such excerpts are fallacious and manipulative, and in a situation like this could easily be used to represent the alternative press as having an overall slant that it does not, in fact, have. For example, say that a dozen fairly anti-authoritarian small zines and journals joined up and started receiving items from this 'clearing-house'. The items include a lot of right-wing pro-family material which the new papers don't use; nevertheless, their NAMES are now attached to the 'service'. Next the 'service' plugs some of this stuff into the 'syndicated column' of one of the Christian Morality hacks like Cal Thomas, and soon his column, claiming to reflect the views of a large number of 'alternative' publications, trumpets that even politically dissident journals are starting to get on board the moral crusade, and this shows that at heart America really is — blah, blah.

Control By Control

THIS CATEGORY, which perhaps sounds like an

4/10

"Hi. This is Fred Woodworth from The Match. I'd like to talk to someone in your payables department."

"Okay, can you hold on?"

Almost a minute elapses. Then — (female voice): "Hello, this is Eve." I again explain my quest for payment. "Oh, the Match? Well, that would be one of Dawn's accounts, and she's not in today." Apparently Eve didn't know me from Adam. "Can I have her call you back? I know she's received a letter from you the other day or something...?" (Eve ends many sentences with question marks.)

(Me:) "I don't have a number where you can call me back. Can you look this up or find out what's going on?" I explain that I cancelled my contract in late July and was told that I'd get a check automatically in '120 days'.

"Well, I could look it up, but it'd probably be just what you said—that the amount's still hanging out there, and she just needs to get a check to you." We have some more conversation which ends up that I simply have to call back Monday, and then, perhaps, Dawn will be there to throw some light on the situation.

I then ask: Does everybody get this 120-day treatment, or is it just me? Oh, it's everybody, absolutely.

Okay, then, how come it's now well past the deadline and still no check?

"Well, to be quite honest with you, um, we haven't had good systems in place, and we're switching computer systems, and it's gonna get better, but I know that doesn't really matter to you, but a lot of times how we do it is, we'll ask

4/13

they've had issue 88 which I'm requesting payment for.)

I started laughing, and finally asked: "You really expect me to believe that 120 days---four months---from today, at the end of NOVEMBER, you are going to pay me for those issues?"

The rep assured me that four months hence, 'the computer' would 'generate' my check. I laughed again and hung up. I mailed off the written confirmation and started waiting. Incidentally, there had been nothing in the 'contract' about any 120-day waiting period. This didn't surprise me, because literally every time in my life that someone has insisted on me signing their 'contract', whenever it's convenient to them they never hesitate to invoke 'policies' and 'procedures' that the contract was utterly silent about.

August passed--- that makes 14 months since issue 88 was mailed. September. October. November. As November 25th came and went, I noted that 17 months had now elapsed since the mailing of issue 88. No payment, of course, was getting 'generated' by any 'computer'.

I wrote another letter, figuring that to put something in writing always has more force than verbal communications. Still no answer.

Friday, December 9, I call again. Female voice answers: "Thank you for calling Fine Print." I explain my errand.

"Oh. At the time being everyone is out of our Accounts Payable. They're all out at lunch... Would you like to call back in about 30-45 minutes?" I said I would.

Call no. 3 (again, I'm paying for these, remember): Male voice: "Hello, Fine Print."

attempt at humor, is really meant quite seriously and denotes interactions that are possibly a little more involved than the simple 'A is A' equation might suggest.

College papers, for example, that are produced by students, commonly regard themselves as free journalistic efforts because their staffs have imbibed the propaganda about commitment to truth and idealism that some of these institutions often pump out. However, since funding is controlled by somebody else in the ultimately gigantic business (not by the noble student journalists), the ability to go on paying for the publication rests with those other persons, and it hinges on their estimation of the acceptability (to themselves) of the publication's content. This may seem very obvious, but perhaps it isn't; we exchange subscriptions with various college papers, and it frequently happens that one or another of them is currently flabbergasted that some administrator has cut their funding.

Other journals grow dependent on grants or consistently large donations without understanding that such support invariably leads to disaster when it ceases. Any publication that is mainly funded by one or two sources, no matter how solidly behind the publication these sources may appear, will sooner or later do something to offend them, and there the history of that particular periodical will most probably come to an end.

I have an example of this from no less than the old Anarchist milieu itself, certainly a place where, if authoritarianism and control can rear their ugly heads, it points to a likelihood that

still worse instances will arise in areas where people don't even claim to be non-authoritarian. This case came to my attention in the early 1970s when I was talking with an old Italian anarchist named Tony Martocchia. He was reminiscing about the activists and writers of the '20s and '30s, and got to talking about Hippolyte Havel, who used to publish a paper called 'The Road to Freedom'. After listening to a few anecdotes about Havel, I asked, "What finally happened to The Road to Freedom, anyway?" Looking me right in the eye, Tony Martocchia said: "The Italians killed it."

Since at that time the remnants of the old Italian Anarchist movement had started supporting my own journal with donations of about \$100 or \$200 per issue, I had a sobering premonition of doom, and a sudden understanding that it was vital to cultivate a broad base of support. To this day I don't know whether he intended to warn me or not, but I took his comment very much to heart. Since then I have followed as closely as I could the policy of paying the journal's expenses with small donations and subscriptions, and mainly using big donations only to buy equipment. Any other practice invites control—and when you invite it, it will come.

Control By Intermediation

AN intermediary, or middle-man, stands between you and someone else. In the case of the alternative press (which came into being precisely because many writers were unable to live with the layers of intermediaries between themselves and their readers) would-be controllers

The *Match* for issue 88 now due and payable. The paper supplier doesn't accept payment the 'next' time I buy paper, and I need to buy paper now."

Now you can see that here I made a very clear request for money that was owed me, also clearly indicating that I needed it to buy paper. Would paper be as important as 'grandmother's funeral'? Evidently not.

No reply ever came, just as none was ever received to my letter from the previous January. I waited a full month for a reply this time—and kept waiting for payment for the year-old issue. Finally I called Fine Print (now remember, I'm paying for these calls).

JULY 25, 1994: Ten minutes on the phone establishes that they're not going to be 'able' to pay The Match what they owe for issue 88 unless they receive a big bundle of issue 89. Well, I respond calmly, I'm never going to send you any more copies at all. In fact, I herewith cancel the present contract in accordance with the General Agreement, which states: 'This contract will be automatically renewed on an annual basis unless prior notice is given by one of its signatories.' The contract was due to expire three days hence, on July 28. I also promised to send, and did send, written confirmation of this verbal cancellation.

At this point the representative began herring and hawing about payment. Finally she said, reluctantly: "Okay, we can do that. But if you cancel, you have to wait 120 days before we pay you."

(Remember, it's already been 13 months that

dangers to those who do attempt to meet corporate America on its terms."

As I began work on issue 89 in the summer of 1994, I realized that I had no interest in further association with Fine Print or any other next-timer distributor. Clearly the arrangement was not doing The Match much good--- no influx of subscribers from that source, no vast publicity or notice. Some small amount of money had come in, but after paying production costs and paying for shipping to Fine Print, the 45% of my magazine's cover price that I was getting back a long time later was a joke, not an asset. So, one year after I'd mailed issue 88 to Fine Print, I decided to begin the last part of my investigation: Would they pay for the last issue if there never was a 'next' issue?

June 28, 1994: I wrote and requested payment for all issues Fine Print had received. I also stated:

"A while back I noticed that Fine Print fronted thousands of dollars to Seth Friedman so he could publish Factsheet Five, and it seems to me that if you can ADVANCE money to some projects, you ought to be able to pay for copies already sold, for other projects like mine. I'm also wondering if you could answer an important question I have: In the case of small magazines that go out of business and never publish a 'next issue' so that your computer gets triggered to issue a check for the final issue that was distributed, what happens to the money? Since there is such a HUGE turnover in the zine realm, and since it appears to be almost impossible for any publications except the privileged few to ever get paid at time of sale (let alone in advance) it occurs to me that there are possibly large sums due, to defunct publishers. What happens to the money?"

"In any case, I consider the amount owed to

have resorted to various clever tactics to keep this form of expression from being as free as it should be.

Once again the 'clearinghouse' principle has proven useful. Individuals set themselves up as a 'center' of information about the alternative press; then under the guise of providing INFORMATION about the entire phenomenon, shape and control, as much as they can, the picture presented to the public by excluding disapproved expressions.

After reading in a huge 'alternative' magazine (which operates on a mysteriously-acquired influx of about \$60,000 a year) that 'The Alternative Press Center' was about to hold a conference on censorship, we wrote this notorious intermediary a letter. Why, we wanted to know, were these people going to pontificate about censorship when for many years in their various Alternative Press Indexes, they had refused even to list the name of The Match? Since their Index is used by libraries to see what allegedly exists in the alternative press realm, and since these libraries apparently don't suspect the exclusionary nature of the Index, our journal basically is excluded from all libraries across the country. (There are only two or three exceptions.)

We wrote:

"Since you're going to present a discussion on censorship, wouldn't it be a good idea to set your own house in order first? For years you've refused to list us in your so-called Indexes; while inevitably ferreting out to list every gutter-quality periodical. You claim that you want to 'inaugurate a discussion on the state of alternative media'. Actually, what you want to do

is **MEDIATE** and **DEFINE** it in your desired form by careful selection and exclusion."

We got this reply, scrawled on our own letter:

"In 1984 *The Match* was rejected because we were looking for pubs with longer articles. Perhaps your pub has changed. Send us several recent issues."

Our 'pub' hasn't changed in any substantial regard during the last two decades, but it wouldn't make any difference if it had, because that's just a typical bogus excuse of controlling types. *

A correspondent of ours writes: "The Alternative Press Center is an outgrowth of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, which was founded by William Phillips of 'Partisan Review', the ex-Trotskyite who impeached all his old associates during the McCarthy era and went on to be the voice of conservatism in the American literary left."

CONTROL by intermediation of course also takes the form of blunt attempts to wrest away access to a magazine's own readers, under the guise of 'helping' the magazine in some way. Subscription 'brokers' such as EBSCO will actually offer, completely without permission, subscriptions to someone's periodical. These they sell at their own selected high price, and pass along to the publisher the normal subscription price. Institutions, thinking that this interaction is countenanced by the publisher, pay the higher price perhaps not even knowing that it IS a high-

zines, tossing the rest out, seems like an appalling waste to me. It smacks of Big-Business-As-usual.

"I do what I do because I have pride in my ideas and my work generally. This is artistic pride and pride of accomplishment. I do not do this work with the idea in mind that somebody is going to be encouraged—or even told it's permissible—to rip my products apart and send torn-off covers somewhere as verification. "Stating that we **PREFER** but do not **DEMAND** whole copy return would be hollow; it would send a message that we didn't really care, and in practice would quickly become complete license to engage in the sloppy, wasteful procedures that corporative publishing engages in."

"Books don't have their covers torn off—not books of substance. To allow this for our magazines would mean that we acquiesce in the attitude that our publications are of diminished importance compared to 'real' or 'substantial' literature. I regard my magazines as the full literary, artistic equal of any book. I am not a second-class publisher to be seated at the back of the bus. ... If I start to think that very many of the pages I stand at the press and print are going to be deliberately trashed as part of some condoned commercial interaction, then I could no longer muster up the sense of validity that I need to go on."

"The sad thing is that the bottom line in all of this is the supposed probability of achieving vast sales. This is the sucker bait that makes people sell out. Well, those who do sell out for such promises won't get paid; that is, they may authorize the torn-off covers, but no gigantic sales will come out of it. No huge, augmented subscriber base will result. Bookstore readers hardly ever subscribe, and the money they do pay for a publication is so divided off that by the time any of it ever gets into the hands of us publishers, it is so little and so late that it frankly makes no difference to us..."

"I am in this for very strongly-felt philosophical reasons, and those don't include my knowingly creating throwaway material. This under-scores, to my way of thinking, the seductive

*The present pamphlet in fact appeared in *The Match*. How much longer articles could they possibly want?

again the distributor demands complete trust... with no apparent reciprocation. Also, yet another little provision of our agreement--- that I would get back entire magazines that were unsold, not just affidavits or torn-off covers as proof--- was being unilaterally discarded. Smith closed, however, with these friendly words:

"On a personal note: I want to thank you for being kind enough to send me copies of the magazine when I was rotting away in a South Dakota prison cell. I appreciated it and so did the many other inmate readers. I wouldn't do you wrong, Fred."

Just to see what would happen, I went ahead and shipped a big box of issue 88 to Fine Print. And after a while, I did get paid for issue 87.

BY January of 1994, I was getting still more word of unilateral changes in our agreement. Now a letter from Fine Print, signed by a Kristi Sprinkle, related that it was just impossible for the distributor to send back whole unsold copies, ever. Instead, the new policy would be that stores would tear off covers of unsold magazines, send back the covers only, and toss the rest of the publications in a dumpster.

Unless Fine Print heard otherwise from me within a few more days, this substitution in our contract would be made automatically.

I replied:

"You know, if you read The Match, that I'm not exactly the most fanatical proponent of recycling that there ever was. However, even though I don't go to such lengths as using inferior paper just because it's 'recycled', I do have concern for the impact my actions have on the earth and its resources. Thus, the notion of someone thinking it is okay to tear covers off my maga-

er price, and the broker after a while 'owns' a big slug of your subscribership. If the broker owns enough of one's subscriptions, and decides to cancel them out and demand money back from you, you can be bankrupted before you realize what happened. This is one very nasty variety of control, but authoritarian distributorships are even worse.

Authoritarian distributors (not to be confused with ones that behave decently and non-controlling toward small magazines), try to dictate almost unbelievable conditions, then demand 50%, 60%, and even more of your magazine's cover price for allowing you the privilege of distributing your publications in certain newsstands and bookstores. To make sure you comply, the distributors lock up as many stores as they can with agreements that keep the stores from buying from you, the publisher, directly. Here is an unsolicited letter we received from Desert Moon Periodicals in Santa Fe New Mexico, who were apparently under the impression that we wanted them to distribute The Match:

"Thanks for submitting your publication. Upon review we have determined that we would not be able to sell enough of your title to justify the costs for us to process and distribute the title. We welcome future submissions, and any efforts on your part to develop your 'zine into a more salable publication.

"We suggest you try to utilize a full-size 8.5 x 11 format to avoid theft at the newsstand and improve visibility.

"Avoid using dates on the cover...

"Use some kind of high resolution graphic and/or a color...

"Always place the masthead at the top...

"Use a one-line descriptive subtitle..."

THIS IS SO ALTERNATIVE

'Keep the price down...to \$2.

'Be prepared to accept only covers as returns. We know it stinks, but... that's how the system works.

'Try a glossy color cover with newsprint for the inside, like Factsheet Five.'

This statement was issued in 1994; since then Factsheet Five, that paragon of all the fussy and rigorous rules laid on by an agency that creates NOTHING, and is strictly in the business of standing between publishers and their sales outlets, has gone under and is no longer being published. Aside from the incredible rudeness and high-handedness of this communication, several points are indeed thought-provoking. First, if you read through the list of 'suggestions' and compare them to the issues of our own magazine being published at the time, it becomes obvious that such graphic nit-picking cannot possibly have been the real reason for the generation of such a letter. More likely is the viewpoint of the magazine—i.e., censorship on the part of the distributor. As when a qualified black applicant is being rejected for a job by a racist employer (in this case before he or she even APPLIES for the job!), the excuse is some laughable mumbo-jumbo about 'standards' which only tries to mask the fact that you wouldn't be accepted no matter what qualifications you had.

A second point that arises after reading something like this is: Would any publication that quietly submitted to such arrogant bullying really be worthy of the name 'Alternative'? In other words, aren't they telling us here that absolute conformity is going to be demanded? How

WHO INSIST ON THEM ARE RIPOFFS

er. All at once Fine Print was a money-lending institution—except, of course, that it was YOUR OWN money they were lending you. I decided to test this one later, too, since I knew that Fine Print already had, in fact, loaned Factsheet Five about \$2000 to get started—i.e., BEFORE publisher Seth Friedman's first issue had been produced at all. How generous would this banker prove to be, I wondered. What standards did it have for determining whom to 'loan' money to? This wasn't all, though. Smith's letter went on:

"You may want to call me anyway because we still have a couple of problems. First, the matter of whole copy returns. We service stores all over the country... but it is only those stores in cities where we actually have our own people stocking the shelves... that we can guarantee whole copy returns of unsold issues. At locations that we don't personally stock it is simply too much aggravation to try to pry whole copies out of distant stores... Reviewing your file, I see that you asked for whole copies... Well, I'm going to treat you like everyone else. We'll pay you for the copies we actually sold, return the whole copies we were able to obtain (a great big one copy this time), and claim affidavit returns for the copies destroyed at distant stores."

Again, another minor but significant departure from the agreement we'd supposedly entered into. Now, instead of getting back the unsold magazines, I'd be getting back somebody's shrug that those copies had been trashed and were being deducted from the amount owed. In theory, a distributor could order any amount whatsoever—thousands, even—and tell you later that nary a one had got sold. I'm not claiming that this was what was happening by any means; but what I do insist on is the nagging little fact that here

is because we have never received number 88.'

In other words, you couldn't go by the letter of the contract. ONE copy wasn't going to trigger them to pay you. This may seem like a minor point, but it is very important because it illuminates a tendency that is downright common in all of these dealings: The small publisher is expected to trust the big distributor, but the big distributor never, in the least detail, trusts the small publisher. To continue with Mr. Smith's letter:

"Our system flags accounts to be paid based on the log-in date of the subsequent issue, so if we don't receive the next ish your mag doesn't come up to be paid. Thus, no check."

I grinned bleakly at this, but it was really just what I'd expected. However, I now began to wonder if all this insistence on the SUBSEQUENT issue didn't mean that if there never was a subsequent issue, a magazine never would get paid. I filed this thought away to test later. Next Smith added:

"Now, although we do have agreed (sic) on terms of payment, Fine Print is more than willing to work with our publishers. We understand the tight financial situation that our smaller publishers face, and we have on many occasions paid early upon request—usually to pay the printer, but also for things that are not strictly business-related, like 'I need money to fly to Grandma's funeral.' The point is, we're sympathetic and we'll come up with the cash early if you ask for it."

Now THIS is an enormously significant remark. It changes the whole interaction from something exact and equal to something paternalistic, like the relationship of a banker and a humble work-

is that different from the mainstream of look-alike, sound-alike, all-the-same-size products of the predictable, tame, 'free' mainstream?

Moreover, isn't it interesting that an ugly and unreadable publication like Factsheet Five, that consistently promoted other ugly and unreadable publications—and went belly-up doing it—was the model these controllers served up for How to Publish?

One has to wonder what exactly is the real intention of the people who try to put themselves in control of the alternative press. Could it just possibly be that they WANT you to fail? Can it be that the failure of a small magazine is somehow ultimately profitable for somebody?

Read on.

SUBMISSION to someone's demands is what intermediating businesses want to impose on small publishers, but before we continue discussing the control aspects of this relationship, in fairness let us ask: Do distributors of this type offer anything in return?

Nominally, yes. In the case of the next-timer distributors especially (that is, those that seem to try to impose the most conditions, and only pay 'next time' you produce an issue), they promise wider circulation for magazines, more chance for your ideas and writing to be considered by readers, more opportunity for you to gain subscribers, and more money than your limited periodical could ever take in on its own.

In my opinion these claims are misleading, for the following reasons:

First, 'wider circulation' — that does mean

that more copies go out of your office. But do they really circulate? No. Distributorships have no stake in keeping the placement of magazines to salable levels; they'd just as soon hit a bookstore or newsstand with 20 or 30 copies of a small journal or 'zine, when sales of five copies might be a much more realistic expectation. If the other 25 copies aren't sold (or if the bookstore SAYS they weren't sold), standard operating procedure is to destroy those copies and pay the publisher the percentage for the small number that did sell. The distributor gets the same amount of money if the store sells five copies out of five sent, or five out of FIFTY. Because the distributorship/middleman doesn't have anything to do with production costs or laborious assembly (as most alternative publishers, in fact, DO), it's no skin off his nose even if most of your press-run vanishes into a dumpster.

Second—'more chance for your material to be read'—well, yes; there's more CHANCE. But in practical terms that chance is pretty small. Again: Since it is in the distributor's interest to move out as many different publications as possible, any particular small-press item lands along with a THOUSAND others on the magazine racks of a large bookstore. Unless a publication is really slick and well-known already, and has a full-color picture of a curvaceous blonde wearing almost nothing on the cover, it isn't going to get noticed. In reality, before long it will probably wind up buried behind dozens of others. Even if people do run across it, for every one who buys, probably 15 or 20 stand at the rack and read it without buying. This may

I now sent out a full 200 after fulfilling all the subscriptions and bookstore orders, I'd have no copies left to fill back-order requests later.

I sent, instead, 150 copies of issue 87 to FP.

And, of course, nothing else happened after that, for a long time. After all, they weren't going to be paying me until '30 days after receipt of the following issue'. I set the matter aside for a while and waited to see what would happen.

In the meantime, I continued to get a fair amount of mail, but never once did anyone mention having stumbled onto The Match at one of the trade shows that Fine Print had bragged about in its promo literature. Nobody said they'd seen the magazine at 'ABA, Mid-south Booksellers, SEBA, Natural Products Expo East OR West, New Frontiers Gay & Lesbian Business Expo,'—or anywhere else that FP had claimed it'd be touting my journal.

Subscriptions that did come in were just exactly the same as always: 'Hi! Saw the review of you in such-and-such a place, and it looks interesting. Sign me up...' etc.

When my next issue, number 88, was done, I decided to run a further test and at the same time minimize my risk somewhat by further invoking my Section F right to limit quantities—I mailed Fine Print a grand total of ONE copy. Would they pay me within 30 days as promised for the previous issue's 150 copies? Thirty days passed and, of course, no payment.

So I wrote to ask for payment for issue 87, and received an interesting reply signed by Philip Smith, who said: 'We have a problem. The reason you hadn't been paid for number 87 yet

the FIRST issue received.

I let this offer slide until 1992 when they sent me a contract, at which point I decided to go ahead as a deliberate experiment, despite all my own previous recommendations in such zines and books as Joe Singer's 'Printer's Devil' or Joe Lane's handbook. Would my magazine really latch onto the giant circulation that all the promotional literature claimed?

Personally, I didn't think so. Experiences in previous years with Ubiquity Distributors and a couple of others convinced me that these outfits worked exclusively in the interests of just one entity: themselves. You had to fight tooth and nail to get them to pay, and my acrimonious adieu to the loathsome slimeball at Ubiquity had resulted in HIM sending ME a bill on some allegedly unsold copies! (You figure it out.)

When I signed Fine Print's contract, I saw that despite the earlier letter's statement about splitting 50-50, the contract listed terms as 55 percent off cover price, payable by the distributor. That's five bucks less out of every hundred dollars; little enough, but still noticeable. I laughed and mailed back the contract anyway, though adding my own emendation: no affidavit returns. Whole-copy return only. This was eventually okayed at FP.

The distributor next asked for 200 copies of the then-current issue (no. 87), but I decided to exercise my right under term F of the 'General Agreement': 'The Match reserves the right to limit quantities.' Since I hadn't planned on sending out this order when I printed that issue, I had not raised my print-run accordingly, and if

be 'circulation' in some sense, but you can get free circulation a lot more easily and directly by delivering your publication to a number of streetcorners where you leave off piles weighed down by a brick.

Third claim—'opportunity to gain subscribers'. This isn't really much of an opportunity. Anybody who buys a magazine off a newsstand tends to assume that the next issue will also be there some time. So they're not itching to subscribe. And few carry writing materials and copy down your address either, so subscriptions rarely result from people browsing through a few sentences or articles without buying the magazine.

Okay, these claims prove to be a disappointment. But how about money — SOME money, anyway? Won't the small publisher at least rake in a few bucks to help keep the whole shaky structure of the publication tottering down the road another day? Think again. The distributor and the bookstore, combined, take at least 60% of every dollar your magazine earns from readers, and when you remember to add in the Post Office's cut you begin to see that these publishing efforts do make money — for everybody but you. The reason you can't make anything off your efforts, while others can, derives from the simple fact that you had to create this product; THEY didn't.

The small amount of money that results from the sale of a tiny alternative press journal is like the dime that you find on a sidewalk: it isn't much, but it feels good to get it just by picking it up. Distributorships, likewise, don't make

YOU DONATE THE FIRST BATCH...

much money off any particular magazine, but compared to your expenses (since ONLY YOU have to physically produce anything), theirs are slight, and they don't do much or any work for a particular magazine in the way of enhancing its placement or sales.

Beyond this, though, 'next-timer' distributors are even worse. THEIR promise has a further horror built into it: that they'll pay you NEXT TIME. That means not only that they get a free loan from you for some period, but when (or if) they do pay, it will be with money depreciated through inflation so that it isn't even worth what it was when you produced the magazine. Finally, since the next-timer is only going to pay on receipt of the next issue, there's even another opportunity for you to be ripped off. Namely, that if as so often happens there IS NO next issue, the chances are excellent that the distributor will never end up paying anything at all.

And it is a well-known fact that turnover in small press publications is exceedingly high. One estimate recently was that maybe as many as one thousand non-mainstream publications go under every year. The typical publisher, meanwhile, doesn't consciously plan on going out of business; he or she doesn't, usually, have the idea in mind that issue X is the final one. Instead, publications tend to just peter out after a while. The small-press enthusiast, reluctant to accept the reality of the situation, keeps thinking that he or she will get around to doing another issue after a while --- then months and years go by... and that's the end of that particular magazine. While the publisher's quiet death is going

BUT WHAT DO THEY GIVE YOU?

thing as extraordinary as this, is the claim that they'll achieve wide readership as a result.

And do they get this wide readership? In a word, NO. Several experiences with distributorships over the years have convinced me that no amount of promises ever compensated for the realities of getting involved with next-timer distributors. Alternative publishers are best advised to seek out their own readers, and not to heed the glib and ready hype they'll hear from some quarters. Anyone who is thinking of publishing any sort of zine, journal, underground paper or anything else is well advised to STAY AWAY from next-timer dealerships.

I've been recommending this avoidance for years now, but, to get material for this article, I decided to sign a contract myself with Fine Print Distributors.

FINE PRINT contacted me for the first time in April of 1990. A letter said they'd seen a copy of The Match and wanted to inquire about distribution. Fine Print, the letter went on, was a 'worker-owned company that had taken the place of Homing Pigeon as the main distributor for alternative magazines in the Texas area.' It said that: 'Our usual terms for business include 50% off cover, affidavit return rights, and you pay the shipping to our warehouse. We'll pay for the second issue within 30 days of receipt of the second issue.'

This last sentence is not a typographical error here; this is really how the letter read. Obviously the writer meant that they'd pay within 30 days after receiving the second issue, for

We will continue to exhibit at these shows and hope to add several more. Magazines are seen by our 1,400 existing accounts and 9,000 prospective customers. ...We will print 12,000-plus catalogs in 1995, so just think of all the exposure you'll get!"

Naturally, in order to reap these wonderful benefits, the small publisher needed to enter into a contract with Fine Print, and send that company copies of the magazine for distribution.

At this point we need to stress again the economic reality of the publisher. First, he or she has basic day-to-day expenses that have to be paid: rent, electricity, and so on. Second, costs of production are payable AT TIME OF DELIVERY. For printing, that means you pay the printer when you pick up the 'zines. Or, if the small publisher does his or her own print-work, he or she still has to pay AT TIME OF DELIVERY, for supplies like paper, ink, plates, and anything else that gets used up. When the small press person finishes assembling the publication and hauls it in to the post office, he or she has to pay right then and there for the postage.

There's no such thing as credit at the post office, and that's pretty much the case everywhere else, too, at the printer's or paper supplier's store or wherever you might have to go to buy things with which to produce the zine.

BUT---! If the publisher signs a contract with a next-timer distributor (Fine Print is, once again, a perfect example), all at once this constant disappears. Because NOW the publisher is to supply his or her own products and not get paid until some time in the indefinite future. The one great promise that gets people to do some-

on, the next-timer distributor, never having paid for that last issue, and probably in most cases never receiving a demand for payment from the publisher, quietly pockets the 20 or 30 dollars that would otherwise be payable when the 'next' issue is produced.

Never produce a next issue, you don't get paid for the last one.

In other words, failure is profitable. This is one of the side-effects when this type of distributor steps in between publisher and readers.

TO ILLUSTRATE some of the operation of the centralizing tendency, and the attitudes back of it, let's look at a recent ad campaign by Fine Print Distributors of Austin Texas. This distributor eventually declared bankruptcy, and legally evaded paying dozens of small-press publications many thousands of dollars. Instead of paying THEM what it owed them, 'Fine Print' apparently created a kind of slush fund which it used to make large cash advances to favored insiders. (One of which was 'Factsheet Five', which, shortly after Fine Print went under, quit publishing. The conclusion is irresistible that when the money that was being collected on the sales of various non-insider zines stopped being funneled to crony Factsheet, the latter couldn't stand on its own.)

Prior to its demise, Fine Print conducted a rather bizarre, but revealing, ad campaign in Factsheet Five, the first ad proclaiming:

'Once Again, These Children Are Safe.'

(Note that the ad says NOTHING about distribut-

ing magazines.) The text reads: 'And it's because of the idea. Banged up children all over are relying on us, each 'zine builder, mover and user, to keep the world safe and exploding in free expression forever.'

Apparently the idea here, underneath the fairly ineffectual simile, is that small publishers (the 'children') are increasingly handing over defense of their freedom (now they're 'safe') to this agency. The ad continues:

"With more blasted reality being discovered each day, and being loaded into graphic forms faster and faster, we all need a headquarters."

Suddenly the you/us dichotomy melts away, and it's just 'us'. Suddenly the distributor is essentially your partner, speaking as 'we', and now advises that what 'we' need is a centralized point of operations — a headquarters. In the following paragraph the most significant statement of all occurs:

"Whenever you print or buy something printed, we're there, in the middle, like a fuse..."

They were 'in the middle'. In other words, they'd suddenly stepped between the small publisher and his or her readers. Naturally they claimed to be performing vital actions that assisted the publishers in reaching those readers; but as frequently happens in such hijackings, the soothing words about things being for your own good are just more bureaucratese for 'We're takin' over, kid; get outta the way!'

The second ad was insistent about two important points. Number one: There is ONE WAY to 'get what you want' (and what you, the

The do-it-yourself publisher, having created some kind of printed material, now wants to see it be read by somebody. And at this point, that publisher starts to confront a choice: Either focus on getting subscribers — readers into whose hands the printed piece is placed, more or less directly, by the publisher... OR, cave in to the wheedling of those who promise to do this FOR him. The first choice is of course an example of what anarchists refer to as 'direct action', individual activity freely undertaken, that needs no approval, defers to no bureaucratic intermediaries, and brooks no censorship. The second choice aligns with the current society-wide system of embedding every act in a matrix of somebody else's secured approval.

While alternative A is certainly more anarchistic, the small publisher tends to be drawn irresistibly down the false trail, B, by sky's-the-limit promises urgently offered at every turn. Here was some promotional material from Fine Print Distributors — material designed to get publishers to put distribution in THEIR hands:

"...Advertise in the BEST catalog in the magazine industry. ...In 1993 we printed 6,000 copies of our first catalog and distributed it across the United States to new and existing accounts. It was 152 pages with scans of some magazines and ads in the back. By 1994, we... included a description and scan of every magazine, a 'Top 150 Titles' page, employee photos, alphabetized listings, category breakdowns, and a perforated credit application and order form. The print run was 11,000 copies, and the catalog had 192 pages. ...Magazines received exposure at these trade shows: ABA, Midsouth Booksellers, SEBA, Natural Products Expo East & West, and the New Frontiers Gay & Lesbian Business Expo.

tralize around the enabling activities of this middle-man.

**There's One Way to
Get What You Want.**

[illegible]

Fine Print Distributors

For illustration of Publisher's Services, Publishers please send samples to
Phone: (512) 425-0718 • Fax: (512) 425-0718
Mail: 500 Pump Drive, Austin, TX 78738-5029 • E-mail: img@pubs.com

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specialize in selling alternative merchandise.'
How does it work?

Very likely these ads do produce revenue for certain types of magazines. Most of those shown in the circular for MMOC are clearly slick, well-funded magazines that can make a lot of money because they have money already. My guess is that the cost of the ads is so high that responses for a specialized or radical publication would still leave the publisher in the hole, perhaps by hundreds of dollars. Ad rates in this case, as is typical, are not stated.

But whether you, the publisher, only break even or fall into a deficit, the MMOC will always have its OWN absolutely solid profit. AND it will have a 'database that can have unlimited value... in the future.'

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Now the big magazine can offer that list for sale to other magazines, private individuals and junk mailers, even government agencies. There is nothing the small publisher can do about it because he doesn't even own that part of his own mailing list!

As an example of this, a half-tabloid on newsprint, called 'News Apropos', was circulating in the mid-'90s on college campuses. A front-page blurb read:

'Wow! Alternative Magazines Galore! Over 270 titles. The best of alternative magazines — unique, hard-to-find diverse magazines and alternative press publications at your fingertips. We've crammed in as many as space allows. For the complete listings check out our Alternative Press Collection located on the order blank.'

None of the almost 300 ads can be answered directly. Readers desiring to buy a sample copy of any of the listed publications have to respond to this 'Alternative Press Collection'.

'Utne Reader' has been doing this for some years now, in its ad feature, 'Off the Newsstand'. Thus, as other periodicals come and go, Utne thrives, not only because of the ad money it gets in from these others, but from the legacy the advertisers have left behind: part of their mailing list, and the valuable, salable, targetable names of the people who shared that particular interest.

Another outfit working the same area is known as 'Magazine Mail Order Central'. According to its brochure, it is: '...an advertising service that produces cash orders for your product. We

You will call Fine Print.
You will call Fine Print.
You will call Fine Print.
You will call Fine Print.

Fine Print. Desires, Inc. - 500 Pumpa Drive - Austin, TX 78758-0038
1-512-532-8199 - 1-800-874-7082 - fax: 512-532-7082 - email: mag@fine.com

Ad no. 3: Inside front cover of Factsheet Five Magazine no. 56, June, 1995. Original size—8½ x 11.

agency. As we've already pointed out, such agencies set themselves up to re-sell other people's subscriptions, and if allowed to operate they end up 'owning' blocs of subscribers, after which they will often try to dictate terms such as frequency of publication, subscription rate, etc.; and if the small publisher refuses they demand refund of the unused portion of the subscriptions they've brokered. Aside from the realization which every small-press person should have that subscription agencies are to be avoided as if they were poisonous snakes, it's

also worthwhile to comprehend how authoritarian agencies, just like governments, tend to keep grabbing up power. Thus a next-timer distributorship, which is from the outset appropriating a measure of control over a publication, is like a boulder on the side of a steep hill: it tends to roll downward, and in so doing it WILL gather momentum. Individual freedom of the press can easily be lost in such power moves.

Further consider the specifics of a distributor advertising that he sells individual copies of a small magazine or journal. By stepping over the line from bulk distribution to selling individual copies by mail-order, the distributor has intruded even more into the domain of the publisher. Now the publisher has supplied the physical copies of the periodical at a big discount (often around 60%, meaning that the publisher gets — if anything at all — only 40% of cover price on copies admitted to have been sold.) If a distributor can use these magazines as a stock from which to sell subscriptions, the distributor can undercut the publisher. In Fine Print's ad, the distributor offered publications at a 40% discount; this means that they would sell a reader a copy of a one-dollar magazine for 60 cents. The publisher, if extremely lucky, will get 40 cents of that, while the distributor undercuts the publisher so that the latter ends up being in competition with himself. The distributor can sell subscriptions, issue by issue, to readers at a lower cost than the publisher can!

ANOTHER way that centralization operates to

control a major aspect of small-press publications is in the realm of advertising. In normal advertising, an entity offering a service or product pays for an ad to be run, and people reading or hearing the notice then either buy this product at a store, or directly from the person or company that placed the ad.

However, in recent years, a new variation of this has arisen. First, some publication with a lot of backing (and therefore a lot of circulation that the small publisher can't get) starts selling ad space. The ads seem normal, except for one thing: the readers can't respond directly to the publications listed in these ads, because the addresses of the advertisers are not printed. Instead, the responding readers have to send off to the big magazine that RAN the ad. That magazine cashes the reader's check for the sample copy or subscription, and eventually (supposedly) puts all such responses together into one check which it finally passes on to the advertiser, with a list of the readers' names and what they want.

Once more, somebody is stepping in between. The problem here again is that by interposing a middle-man, the small publication loses its full autonomy: Now the big magazine that ran the ad has a copy of the names of everybody who responded to the ad. If the ad ran long enough, and if a small publication had no other means of soliciting readers, eventually the big magazine would own a copy of the small magazine's entire mailing list — a valuable item that publications sometimes sell... only in this case the small mag has PAID the big mag to take it!